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PRESIDENT WILSON'S LACK OF POLICY IN MEXICO

[The author of this article is an American of high standing and reputation who has had intimate knowledge of Mexican conditions from the days of Diaz to the present. Due to his Mexican connections it seems unwise to have his name appear at this time.—EDITORS.]

Strictly speaking President Wilson has had no definite constructive Mexican policy. His whole course in dealing with Mexico has been characterized by lack of policy, by vacillation, inconsistency and harmful meddling. Apparently oblivious to the gravity of the situation, he has preferred to drift on the current of events, shifting his position to meet the changing needs of the hour and to "trust to luck" that all might turn out well, rather than adopt a settled policy based upon a full comprehension of the facts of the situation. Deliberately he has closed his eyes to the facts or, what is worse, has sought to bend those facts that have been thrust upon him by the development of events to fit a preconceived theory. But the chief vice of his Mexican performance lies in the fact that he has *talked* one way and *acted* another. It is this practice that has caused friends to doubt his sincerity and strangers to suspect him of duplicity and double dealing. Protesting all the while that the affairs of Mexico were not our business or the business of any other foreign power, and constantly asserting that he would not interfere in the affairs of that country or permit anyone else to interfere, he has in fact and in truth been interfering continuously since he entered the presidency, and to no useful purpose. The records show this. In his famous Indianapolis speech, in which he defined his attitude towards Mexico, he said:

It is none of my business, and none of your business, how long they (the Mexicans) take in determining who shall be their governors or what their government shall be. It is none of your business, and none of my business, how they go about the busi-

ness. It is theirs. The country is theirs. The government is theirs. And so far as my influence goes, while I am President, nobody shall interfere with them.

FIRST ACT OF INTERFERENCE

Notwithstanding this and numerous other similar utterances, President Wilson began his administration by interfering in Mexican affairs for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Victoriana Huerta. Raising the slogan "Huerta must go," he first undertook to do this by peaceful means and to that end sent John Lind on a diplomatic mission to persuade General Huerta to renounce the presidency. Mr. Lind exhorted General Huerta to resign, offering as an inducement that the United States would render Mexico financial aid (a thing which neither he nor President Wilson had any constitutional right to do) and finally went so far as to serve notice on him that the Washington government would not consent to his becoming a candidate for the presidency at the coming elections. This unprecedented act of interference was resented by all Mexicans, Huertistas and Carranzistas alike. It betrayed President Wilson's lack of understanding of the Mexican character and of the elemental facts which underlay the problem with which he was dealing, filled his friends with mortification and made himself the laughing stock of foreign nations. Nothing could be more ridiculous than the spectacle of the President of the United States attempting to remove from the presidency of Mexico by means of moral suasion an old Indian who had waded through treason and assassination to that position. The Lind mission of course was a great failure and a greater blunder.

SECOND ACT OF INTERFERENCE

President Wilson's second act of interference was the blockading of the city of Vera Cruz, Mexico's principal seaport, by our fleet and the capture of that city by our marines and soldiers. This cost the United States the lives of nineteen American seamen and sixteen millions of treas-

ure. It cost Mexico the lives of several hundred of her citizens. This was nothing short of an act of war. It was armed intervention. It was done ostensibly to force the individual Huerta, whom President Wilson would not recognize as president of the de facto government of Mexico, to salute the American flag in reparation for an offense committed against the dignity of the United States by some of Huerta's soldiers at the city of Tampico. The flag was not saluted and had it been, President Wilson, in accordance with international usage, would have been obliged to return the salute and thus accord Huerta the official recognition he had resolved to withhold from him. In view of the foregoing facts, it can hardly be said that the reason given by President Wilson for the Vera Cruz expedition was such as to commend itself to the good judgment of mankind. But whatever he might have had in mind, there can be no dispute about the fact that the act itself was nothing short of intervention by armed force in Mexico, and this at the very time when he was insisting that he would never interfere or permit anyone else to interfere in the affairs of that country.

THIRD ACT OF INTERFERENCE

President Wilson interfered a third time in Mexican affairs when, during the Villa revolution, he threw the moral influence of the Washington government in favor of Villa and against Carranza. When Carranza, with the aid of President Wilson, had overthrown Huerta, it was clear to all who knew the situation, that Carranza was menaced by a revolt in his own ranks, headed by Villa. President Wilson was notified of this fact at the time and was urged to use his influence to prevent Villa and the men who were behind him from taking this step. The revolt came. Mr. Wilson declined to interfere on the ground that the quarrel was a domestic one and one to be settled by the parties themselves and announced he would take no part in it. Within four weeks after he had made this announcement, the moral influence of the Wilson administration was

thrown unequivocally in favor of the Villa faction and against Carranza and continued to be so exerted until Villa was defeated by Obregon at the battle of Celaya. Here is where the President's Mexican policy fell down.

It was the Villa revolution that destroyed Mexico. It was the most disastrous revolution, both from the standpoint of loss of life and property, that Mexico ever experienced. It should have been prevented. It was in President Wilson's power to do this. If immediately after he and Carranza had overthrown Huerta Mr. Wilson had recognized Carranza promptly and rendered him substantial aid, the Villa revolution would not have happened. This was the obvious thing to have done and President Wilson's friends, both in Mexico and the United States, expected him to do it. They were amazed when the President decided to identify his administration with a man who for fifteen years had been an open, notorious and professional bandit and murderer, and who was such at the time the President gave him his support. When Mr. Wilson did this, he became responsible for the movement which broke down the Constitutionalist cause, a cause which he started out to support, thus destroying his own Mexican policy.

When the Villa revolution ended in failure Mexico was in desolation, and the prestige of the Washington government in that country was gone. Carranza was victorious and afterwards forced recognition from the Washington government, but it came too late. The Villa revolution weakened Carranza and left him incapable of coping with the situation, for the reason that he could not borrow the necessary money to establish peace and rehabilitate his country. President Wilson's policy of vacillation and inconsistency not only destroyed the prestige of his administration in Mexico, but also its prestige in the financial circles throughout the world to which Carranza must of necessity look for the necessary funds for the rehabilitation of Mexico. No financiers anywhere will extend credit to the Carranza government so long as it is backed up by a Washington government with such a vacillating, hesitating and inconsistent policy.

FOURTH ACT OF INTERFERENCE

In June, 1915, Mr. Wilson issued an official warning to General Carranza, who at that time had triumphed over Villa, to the effect that the state of anarchy which then existed in that country would not be tolerated longer by his government and in this dispatch the following language was used: "The country is without a government and the people are starving." He served notice on Carranza that unless he promptly put an end to anarchy and established a government in Mexico, the Washington government would be forced to take such steps. No heed was given to this warning. For the first time in our history the moral influence of the government of the United States in the affairs of Mexico counted for nothing. The truth is that after our alliance with the bandit Villa the moral influence of our government in Mexican affairs was a thing of the past. For nearly a century this influence had been the controlling factor in Mexican politics. It had driven the forces of Napoleon out of the country and put Juarez in power. It had sustained Diaz in power for thirty-five years and had finally brought about his overthrow. It was responsible for the success of the Madero revolution and the placing of Madero at the head of the Mexican government, and also contributed to his downfall. It had overthrown Huerta. But after it had been used in support of the bandit Villa, its force was gone. The American flag had become an object of derision and contempt.

The time finally came when President Wilson felt that he had to act. And what did he do? He asked the A. B. C. Powers to join him in intervening in Mexico to the extent of calling the heads of the various warring factions into a conference for the purpose of composing their differences and forming a government. In this call the President clearly intimated that no one who did not respond and join in this conference would receive consideration by him in dealing with Mexico in the future. The result was that Villa and Zapata and a few other bandit chiefs responded to the call, and the world witnessed the humiliating spec-

tacle of the government of the United States counseling and conferring, on the subject of its future policy in Mexico, with men who all their lives had been open, notorious and professional bandits and murderers, and who at the time the conference was called were bandits and murderers still. Only one of the factional leaders refused to join this conference, and within six weeks after the conference was held, this man, who was none other than Carranza, was recognized by President Wilson as the head of the de facto government of Mexico.

FIFTH ACT OF INTERFERENCE

Again, after the Columbus, New Mexico, massacre, President Wilson intervened in Mexico by force of arms and again to no purpose, except a very bad one. No situation had confronted the American nation during its whole history more extraordinary than the one presented by this occurrence. Villa had violated the sovereignty of the United States and massacred a large number of its citizens deliberately and without cause, yet this crime of Villa's was slight in comparison with the offense which President Wilson committed against the life of the nation by the manner in which he handled this occurrence. The facts are these: Villa, after President Wilson had deserted him and thrown his support to their common foe Carranza, swore vengeance against all Americans who might cross his path. Pursuant to this resolution, he murdered Americans in Mexico wherever he found them. On one occasion at Santa Ysabel in the State of Chihuahua, in January, 1915, one of his bands massacred in the most horrifying and barbaric manner imaginable seventeen American engineers and mining men. Not content with this, he resolved to transfer the scene of his depredations to the American soil and so announced it. Pursuant to this resolution he entered the State of New Mexico and massacred thirty-three American citizens of the town of Columbus. When this occurred, the feeling was general throughout the world that the event marked in a most conclusive way the

final breakdown of the Carranza government and it was also felt that President Wilson would so regard it and at last would meet the Mexican situation squarely. Had he done this and intervened in Mexico by force of arms for the purpose of establishing peace throughout the entire country and setting up a stable government (having first given Carranza a reasonable time in which to capture and execute Villa and his band), such a step would have been approved by all the world and would have commended itself to Carranza himself. Carranza and his associates would have recognized that if they failed to put an end to such depredations forthwith, they would thereby forfeit their right to rule Mexico. The feeling was universal that if Carranza failed to meet the above demand, President Wilson would take the following position with him:

That the government of United States as well as a number of governments of Latin America and of Europe had recognized him as the head of the de facto government of Mexico;

That he had been given an opportunity to establish peace and stable government in that country and had failed;

That he was neither able to protect his own citizens or the citizens of any foreign power domiciled in his country;

That he was no longer able to perform any of the duties imposed upon him by his treaties with foreign nations or to perform any obligation imposed upon his government by reason of its membership in the family of nations;

That he was no longer able to perform any domestic obligation to his own people or to maintain law and order within his own territory;

In short, that his government had collapsed utterly, that Mexico was in anarchy and her people were starving;

That in view of these facts it was incumbent upon the government of the United States in the performance of its obligation to the Mexican people as a friendly neighbor, in the performance of its obligation to those Americans who were domiciled, owning property and doing business in Mexico under the protection of treaty guarantees, and to

Americans who dwelt along the Mexican border, in the performance of its obligation to foreign powers which the government of the United States would not permit, by reason of the existence of the Monroe Doctrine, to enter Mexico and protect their nationals domiciled in that country in the only adequate manner open to them, namely by setting up a government under which every one could live and be protected—that in view of these facts the Washington government had resolved in the interest of humanity and civilization and as a matter of international equity and fair dealing to enter Mexico by force of arms for the purpose (1) of establishing peace, (2) of setting up a stable government, and (3) of retiring and returning the government and the country in its entirety to the Mexican people after peace and order had been restored.

Far from taking such a course, President Wilson did not even undertake to hold Carranza responsible for this crime against the sovereignty of the American nation. He treated the massacre as an unfortunate occurrence on the Mexican border and proceeded to hold the bandit Villa responsible for it. He smothered the flame of indignation which blazed up from the spirit of the American people at the commission of this crime. He minimized the importance of the occurrence and, raising the slogan "Villa dead or alive," organized a punitive expedition to be sent into Mexico for the sole purpose of apprehending and executing Villa and his band. He assured Carranza that he did not mean to violate the sovereignty of Mexico and proceeded to do this in the most fundamental manner possible. His so-called punitive expedition was nothing more or less than the invasion of Mexican territory with a large part of our regular army on an enterprise which involved the policing of a large portion of Mexican territory for an indefinite period of time. This expedition was doomed to failure in advance and the fact was so recognized by everyone who was familiar with Mexican conditions. It was also calculated to involve the nation in a war with Carranza in which our position would be untenable and indefensible. It was clear to everyone familiar with conditions in Mexico

that Carranza could not tolerate the existence of American troops on Mexican soil under the circumstances for a long period of time without confessing his impotency to deal with the situation, which would of necessity bring about his downfall. The net results were those which were anticipated at the time. Our troops have been in Mexico for many months. Many lives have been sacrificed. Over a hundred millions of treasure has been spent. Villa has not been apprehended. Carranza has ordered our army out of the country and the two nations are now facing a catastrophe of unprecedented gravity.

By minimizing the gravity of the Columbus massacre President Wilson has infused into the spirit of the American people a sense of indifference to and lack of appreciation of the dignity and honor of their country. This course is calculated to teach our people tamely to submit to any insult however grave which may be offered to the nation. The benumbing and paralyzing influence of such a policy upon the patriotic sensibility and spirit of the nation is incalculable. It teaches that the value of American lives is nothing, that the honor and dignity of the nation are nothing. If this policy is continued, when a great crisis does arise, as surely it will in the future history of the country, the government will call in vain upon its citizens for aid. The nation is suffering from a lack of fighting spirit at the present time. After five months of recruiting to get an "immediate increase" of 20,000 men for the army the actual strength of the establishment is today less than the authorized strength on July 1, 1915. Who would fight for the nation under such hesitating, vacillating and spiritless leadership as it now has! No language is strong enough to contain the condemnation which arises in the hearts of all patriotic Americans at the manner in which President Wilson has conducted the affairs of the nation in connection with the Columbus, New Mexico, massacre. It is not too much to say his present policy, if persisted in, will destroy the morale of our army and deal a damaging blow to the spirit of the people and the life of the nation.

PROTECTION OF AMERICAN CITIZENS DOMICILED IN
FOREIGN COUNTRIES

From the beginning of his administration President Wilson has apparently had no appreciation of the duty which the government of the United States owes to its citizens domiciled and engaged in business in foreign countries under the protection of treaty rights. This has been evidenced on numerous occasions when Americans domiciled in Mexico applied to the Washington government for relief. These Americans were invariably met with such questions: "What are you doing in Mexico?" "Why do you not come home?" They were given to understand that the administration regarded them as concession hunters and adventurers and not entitled to the protection of the Washington government. In fact President Wilson went so far as to issue orders on a number of occasions directing Americans to leave their possessions in Mexico and return to the United States. The effect of this attitude on the Mexicans was immediate and far-reaching. The lives and property of Americans were destroyed by bandits and revolutionary factions without let or hindrance. This policy not only violated the pledges of the Democratic platform upon which President Wilson went into power, together with the traditions and honor of the United States which required it to protect its citizens domiciled in foreign countries at all times, but its demoralizing influence upon the Mexican people themselves was indescribable. Had President Wilson accorded to the Americans domiciled in Mexico the protection to which they were entitled under the rules of international law and under the pledges of the government, it would have had a strong, sustaining and restraining influence upon the Mexican government itself. During the Diaz administration our government vigorously enforced the protection of the lives of all of its citizens domiciled in Mexico, together with that of their property. This policy likewise brought protection to the lives and properties of all foreigners living in Mexico. By virtue of this policy President Diaz was forced to devote a large portion

of his time and energy to maintaining peace throughout his country to the end that he might not be involved in difficulties with foreign nations and especially with the United States. The moral aid of such a policy to President Diaz himself was great. When this restraining influence was removed by President Wilson's administration, the Mexican people immediately lapsed into chronic revolution and anarchy. The feeling is general among those who know Mexico best, that had President Wilson met the situation squarely and vigorously immediately after he entered office by affording absolute protection to Americans domiciled and doing business in Mexico, not only would he have saved the lives and property of such citizens from destruction, but he would have rendered the Mexican government itself a very substantial aid.

OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE MONROE DOCTRINE

Nor has President Wilson apparently taken into consideration the obligations imposed upon this nation by the enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine for a period of ninety-three years. It is absurd to contend that we can enjoy the benefits flowing from the enforcement of that doctrine and escape the responsibilities which such a course imposes upon us. The sooner these responsibilities are recognized and met by the government of the United States, the better it will be for our government and for all who are concerned with its future operations on this hemisphere.

Can it be contended that it is permissible for the government of the United States to say to Mexico that it cannot alienate any portion of its territory to foreign powers and to say to foreign powers that they cannot acquire any portion of the territory of Mexico without assuming the consequences and responsibilities of such a position? This position in its last analysis means that in international affairs the ultimate sovereignty over Mexico is lodged in the Washington government. "Today," declared Richard Olney, "the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it

confines its interposition." This principle has been recognized in our dealing with Santa Domingo and Hayti, and with some of the Central American republics. But hitherto it has not been publicly recognized by the present administration in so far as it is applicable to Mexico. In the light of these facts it would appear that President Wilson's whole thesis with reference to our attitude towards Mexico is wrong and always has been wrong. His contention that the United States has no political responsibilities in Mexico cannot be sustained in the light of historical facts. The chancelleries of the world assume and have a right to assume that we must acknowledge and meet the responsibilities incident to the enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine or we must abandon it.

It thus appears that President Wilson's course in dealing with the Mexican situation since his advent to power has been characterized by lack of definite policy, by vacillation, inconsistency and harmful meddling and has resulted in disaster to the interests of both countries. It is not too much to say that in a large measure it has been responsible for the complete collapse of organized government in Mexico, for the destruction of hundreds of lives of Americans and other foreign subjects domiciled in that country under the protection of treaty rights, for benumbing and paralyzing the national spirit of the American people, and that it has seriously impaired throughout the world the century-old reputation of the government of the United States for frankness and square dealing in its intercourse with foreign nations.